

Book Reviews

Freedom, Turning Point of First War of 1857: India's Independence by Dr. Suresh Chand and Savita Nigam, Universal Voice Delhi, 2007, ISBN 978-81-90401, pp. 175, ₹350.

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This book is about India's First Freedom Struggle (Revolt of 1857) and it also assesses the status of society in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The revolt of 1857, better known as the sepoy mutiny has a very significant place in the history of India. Hundreds of books and articles have been written and published on this very topic since the attainment of independence in 1947. This book is another contribution to this series. Though it would seem that every aspect of the great upheaval of 1857 has already been discussed by earlier writers, historians and scholars, Suresh Chand and Savita Nigam have tried their best to present us new aspects of the Revolt of 1857.

The first chapter is about Decline of Mughal Empire. The chief reason for the downfall is identified as the financial crisis of the Mughals. It was the direct outcome of the wars of succession, rebellions and luxurious style of living which affected in the steady depletion of the economic resources leading to financial bankruptcy. The second chapter about Status of Society in Eighteenth Century explains how *Zamindari* system worked in those days by showing how a few large Zamindars controlled half of the total landed property of Bengal. People were divided into various castes and *Dalits* (untouchable castes) were not allowed to let their shadow fall upon a non-*Dalit* caste member.

In the third chapter the authors explain about the consequences of the British rule in India beginning with the company being given trade rights by the Mughal Emperor. This chapter goes onto focus how the company eventually captured the whole India. The fourth chapter contains the discussions revolving around reforms. The contribution of Raja Rammohan Roy, the first modern man of India has been aptly depicted with special reference to his social activities and the role of Brahmo Samaj featuring in this segment. The illustrious career, personality and political achievement of Mahatma Gandhi and the hot controversies and criticism revolving around Gandhi regarding the partition of India also find a place in the book.

The fifth chapter has its focus on the Causes of Freedom Movement. The war for independence had diverse political, economic, military, religious and social causes.

There is no agreed name for the events of this period, but terms in use include 'First War of Independence'. The sixth chapter is about 'The Struggle for Freedom and its Attainments'. This chapter explains how the religious reasons ignited the struggle for India's Freedom movements. In this part, authors also give some critique of the 1857 war: first, for example, the government instructed to use lard of a goat or sheep in the bullet cartridges but to save some money authorities used cow and pig instead; secondly, the question arises as to why the mutiny in protest of the cartridges eventually led the Hindu and Muslim troops to use the same weapons to fight their war?

In the seventh chapter the discussion revolves around the attributes and policies of East India Company. The Doctrine of Lapse gets some pointed discussion regarding the eventual acceptance of the Doctrine by the Indian rulers. It also contains the chronological narrative recording in some detail the role of the leaders of Mutiny: Nana Sahib, Tatya Tope, Rao Tula Ram, Rani Lakshmi Bai, Mangal Pandey and Kunwar. In the eighth chapter the authors discuss about Degradation of Indian Administrators and how East India Company maintained a well-established army of 2, 57,000 sepoys (soldiers).

In the ninth chapter, conflict between the cultures of East and West is focused. The authors have discussed how the East-West contrast is sometimes criticized as relativistic. In the topic 'Conflict between East-West Culture' authors give us a new aspect of the Revolt of 1857. This probably stands as the best and most authentic part of the work. In the last chapter the authors have discussed the Caste and Religion Prejudice Movement. In this context the author has discussed about few odd systems such as Symbolic Sati, Royal Funerals, Jauhar, Burials, and untouchability.

On the whole, starting from the decline of the Mughal Empire, the book throws light on the status of society in eighteenth century; gives emphasis to the "Freedom" movement with its struggles and its achievements and consequently, ends with the tragic episode of the Revolt of 1857. Indeed, The Great Revolt of 1857 is highlighted as the turning point deserving to be regarded as First War of India's Independence. The book tries to give detailed descriptions of the Revolt of 1857 though most of the facts and figures can be found already discussed by number of scholars, researchers and historians. However, the simple language used in the book and its narrative is definitely helpful especially for the students.